

**Statement of John F. Tierney
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives**

**Hearing on “Money, Guns, and Drugs: Are U.S. Inputs Fueling Violence on the
U.S.-Mexico Border?”**

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This Subcommittee has recently held a number of hearings on countries – chiefly Pakistan and Afghanistan – where terror runs rampant and our national security interests are generally perceived to be significant. Now I’d like to paraphrase a brief introductory paragraph of a recent article printed by *the “Economist”* magazine:

“In recent months the people of a certain country have become inured to carefully choreographed spectacles of horror. Just before Christmas the severed heads of eight soldiers were found dumped in plastic bags near a shopping center in the capitol of a state. Last month another three were found in an icebox near a border community. The country’s President states that ‘Organized crime is out of control.’ He has pitted 45,000 army troops against the drug traffickers, but in 2008, more than 6,200 people died in the country in drug-related violence, more than twice the number killed in 2007. More than 1,000 people have died so far in 2009. Troops and police have fought pitched battles against drug gangsters armed with rocket-launchers, grenades, machine guns, and armor-piercing sniper rifles, such as the Barrett 50.”

The article does not describe Pakistan or Afghanistan. It is a story about our neighbor to the South – Mexico! The world’s twelfth-largest economy, the United States’ second-biggest trading partner and an important oil supplier. Our former “drug czar,” General Barry McCaffrey says the picture there is dangerous and a worsening situation that fundamentally threatens U.S. national security. Last month, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said, “*Mexico right now has issues of violence that are a different degree and level than we’ve ever seen before.*” Some, most notably President Calderon [call-der-OWN], dispute such a grim picture, but few, if any, contest that matters are serious.

The *Economist* article notes that the drug industry is worth some \$320 billion a year, and that the U.S. alone spends some \$40 billion each year trying to eliminate the supply of drugs. Mr. Medina Mora is quoted in the article as noting that of 107,000 gun shops in the U.S., 12,000 are close to the Mexican border and their sales are much higher than average. “Thousands of automatic rifles are bought for export to Mexico, which is illegal.” In addition, cash is moving from America into Mexico.

Today, the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs focuses on this increasingly urgent national security challenge – one that’s not halfway around the world, but one that’s quite literally at our doorstep: the increasing violence along the U.S.-Mexico border.

And that violence is increasingly spilling over onto U.S. soil. The U.S. Justice Department called Mexican gangs the “*biggest organized crime threat to the United States*,” noting that they operate in at least 230 U.S. cities and towns. Phoenix is now the U.S. capital of kidnappings, with more than 370 cases last year. The city of El Paso, Texas, sits a stone’s throw away from Ciudad Juarez, where more than 1,550 people were killed in drug wars last year.

Border violence is receiving increased attention by the U.S. government, including by a number of committees in Congress.

At these hearings, I’m sure the Mérida [MARE-i-duh] Initiative will be discussed along with other efforts by the U.S. to strengthen Mexican police and judicial institutions.

I’m sure questions will be asked about what the U.S. can do to ensure this violence doesn’t spread from south to north.

I’m sure there’ll be calls for our southern neighbors to get their house in order.

But all of this is just one part of the equation. Today’s hearing asked the central question: are there laws and activities on the American side of the border fueling this violence in Mexico?

According to the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, 90 percent of guns confiscated from Mexican organized crime originated in the United States.....90 percent.

And we’re not just talking handguns and hunting rifles. William Newell, special agent in charge of the ATF station in Arizona, noted, for example: “*Eighteen months ago we saw a spike in .50-caliber machine guns heading south.*”

The table in front of the room has an example of a .50 caliber weapon.

[Point out weapon.]

And here’s a bullet fired from this weapon.

[Hold up a .50 caliber round.]

According to ATF statistics, more than 7,700 guns sold in America were traced to Mexico in 2008 – twice the 3,300 recorded the previous year and more than triple the 2,100 traced the year before that.

And how do Mexican cartels get the money to buy these U.S. guns? The Woodrow Wilson Center put it this way: “*profits from drug sales in the United States pump roughly \$15 to \$25 billion every year into illicit activities in Mexico.*” (emphasis added)

In short – U.S. drug use creates billions in illicit profits that are then used by Mexican cartels to buy U.S. guns. The profits and guns – and drug precursors in some cases – then find their way back across the border to Mexico and fuel the increasing violence.

This is a vicious cycle that we simply must break.

Our kids, our schools, and our neighborhoods are quite literally at stake.

And U.S. national security and the stability of our southern neighbor also hang in the balance.

This Subcommittee has conducted – and will continue to conduct – extensive oversight into the volatile situation in Pakistan. Last month, a *Wall Street Journal* article concluded:

Much as Pakistan is fighting for survival against Islamic radicals, Mexico is waging a do-or-die battle with the world’s most powerful drug cartels... The parallels between Pakistan and Mexico are strong enough that the U.S. military singled them out recently as the two countries where there is a risk the government could suffer a swift and catastrophic collapse.”

Here are the words of our own U.S. military:

In terms of worst-case scenarios for the [U.S.] Joint Force and indeed the world, two large and important states bear consideration for a rapid and sudden collapse: Pakistan and Mexico.... The Mexican possibility may seem less likely, but the government, its politicians, police, and judicial infrastructure are all under sustained assault and pressure by criminal gangs and drug cartels. How that internal conflict turns out over the next several years will have a major impact on the stability of the Mexican state. Any descent by Mexico into chaos would demand an American response based on the serious implications for homeland security alone.

As the Obama Administration, the Congress, and the American people increasingly pay attention to the violence in Mexico, my hope is that we not only discuss the Mérida Initiative and other efforts to help our southern neighbor; that we not only ask

the Mexican government to get its house in order; but that we also look inside our own borders; that we look to our own drug consumption, to our own gun laws, and to our own anti-money laundering initiatives, and ask what more we can do ... what more we can do on our side of the border.

My hope is that this hearing will result in some concrete recommendations for the U.S. Congress to consider. We will hear from top experts who have examined and studied these issues, and we greatly appreciate all of our witnesses being here today.

U.S.-Mexico border violence can only be solved if we look at all parts of the equation; if we examine everything that's fueling the fire. Let's examine our gun laws, let's explore ways to cut down on U.S. drug consumption; let's ask if we need more resources to root out money laundering.

The peace and well-being of both our countries – and both our peoples – depends on it.